

First Union tackles CRM with *CRMs*

A huge force of new customer relationship managers, backed by a relationship database is the bank's latest effort to focus on customer needs

When a big organization embraces a new theme, you sometimes get the impression of employees walking the halls chanting a new business mantra, like something out of "Dilbert." Well, employees of First Union so far aren't walking around chanting CRM, but the concept of customer relationship management is becoming pervasive in the \$23 billion asset banking company headquartered in Charlotte. The bank's latest CRM effort cuts across business units and product and service areas.

On the retail side, customer relationship man-

out. "The [job of CRM] is one way in which we have taken the whole thinking about customer relationship management, and made it live and breathe in our retail structures," says Brenda Wensil, senior vice-president, customer relation process leader.

Choices are not enough

The CRM position is only about six months old, but its roots go back to consumer research First Union conducted about five years ago, explains Wensil. "Customers said to us, 'We want choice, and we want alternative ways of doing business with you. We don't want to be trapped and confined into the old ways of doing things where we have to live by your hours and your channels.'" So, First Union gave its customers choices, including ATMs call centers, and online banking. But, as many other institutions have found out, it is not enough simply to provide customers with alternative delivery channels. While some customers seek out these options and embrace them with open arms, others need to be educated about the benefits before they will use them. And still others need a live human being to teach them how to use an unfamiliar channel for the first time.

But the bank's goal in educating customers is not necessarily to move customers to self-service (i.e., less costly) channels. "We want customers to do what they want to do. What is on our shoulders is to make sure they are educated; that they have a choice," Wensil says.

Focusing on the customer is the CRMs priority. Therefore, CRMs are removed from administrative tasks such as scheduling staff and doing performance reviews typical of a branch manager. But the position does come with some managerial responsibilities. "CRMs primary role is to influence the team dynamics in that office. They are very much responsible for the performance of the unit," says Wensil. In addition, when a customer has a problem, "the buck stops with the CRM."

Measuring customer satisfaction

How do you measure whether you are doing a



agement is embodied by First Union's 1,800 employees with the job title of, appropriately enough, CRM—Customer Relationship Manager. This small army of CRMs is stationed in most of First Union's 2,300 branches, which it now calls Financial Centers. The CRMs job is to manage the customer experience—taking care of the customer from the time they walk in, to the time they walk

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PHOTOS BY TONY STONE